

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
March 11 - 17, 2011

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1. [President Obama: "We Will Stand with the People of Japan" \(03-17-2011\)](#)

Having just returned from the Japanese Embassy where he [wrote a message in a condolence book for victims](#), the President spoke at the White House on the tragic events in Japan. He made clear that the American government is helping in any way it can, is working for the safety of Americans in the country, and that the American West Coast is not in danger even under worst case scenarios. Read his full remarks below:

Good afternoon, everyone. Over the last several days, the American people have been both heartbroken and deeply concerned about the developments in Japan.

We've seen an earthquake and tsunami render unimaginable -- an unimaginable toll of death and destruction on one of our closest friends and allies in the world. And we've seen this powerful natural disaster cause even more catastrophe through its impact on nuclear reactors that bring peaceful energy to the people of Japan.

Today, I wanted to update the American people on what we know about the situation in Japan, what we're doing to support American citizens and the safety of our own nuclear energy, and how we are helping the Japanese people contain the damage, recover and rebuild.

First, we are bringing all available resources to bear to closely monitor the situation, and to protect American citizens who may be in harm's way. Even as Japanese responders continue to do heroic

work, we know that the damage to the nuclear reactors in Fukushima Daiichi plant poses a substantial risk to people who are nearby. That is why yesterday, we called for an evacuation of American citizens who are within 50 miles of the plant. This decision was based upon a careful scientific evaluation and the guidelines that we would use to keep our citizens safe here in the United States, or anywhere in the world.

Beyond this 50-mile radius, the risks do not currently call for an evacuation. But we do have a responsibility to take prudent and precautionary measures to educate those Americans who may be endangered by exposure to radiation if the situation deteriorates. That's why last night I authorized the voluntary departures of family members and dependents of U.S. officials working in northeastern Japan.

All U.S. citizens in Japan should continue to carefully monitor the situation and follow the guidance of the U.S. and Japanese governments. And those who are seeking assistance should contact our embassy and consulates, which continue to be open and operational.

Second, I know that many Americans are also worried about the potential risks to the United States. So I want to be very clear: We do not expect harmful levels of radiation to reach the United States, whether it's the West Coast, Hawaii, Alaska, or U.S. territories in the Pacific. Let me repeat that: We do not expect harmful levels of radiation to reach the West Coast, Hawaii, Alaska, or U.S. territories in the Pacific. That is the judgment of our Nuclear Regulatory Commission and many other experts.

Furthermore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and public health experts do not recommend that people in the United States take precautionary measures beyond staying informed. And going forward, we will continue to keep the American people fully updated -- because I believe that you must know what I know as President.

Here at home, nuclear power is also an important part of our own energy future, along with renewable sources like wind, solar, natural gas and clean coal. Our nuclear power plants have undergone exhaustive study, and have been declared safe for any number of extreme contingencies. But when we see a crisis like the one in Japan, we have a responsibility to learn from this event, and to draw from those lessons to ensure the safety and security of our people.

That's why I've asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to do a comprehensive review of the safety of our domestic nuclear plants in light of the natural disaster that unfolded in Japan.

Finally, we are working aggressively to support our Japanese ally at this time of extraordinary challenge. Search and rescue teams are on the ground in Japan to help the recovery effort. A disaster assistance and response team is working to confront the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami. The U.S. military, which has helped to ensure the security of Japan for decades, is working around the clock.

To date, we've flown hundreds of missions to support the recovery efforts, and distributed thousands of pounds of food and water to the Japanese people. We've also deployed some of our leading experts to help contain the damage at Japan's nuclear reactors. We're sharing with them expertise, equipment, and technology so that the courageous responders on the scene have the benefit of American teamwork and support.

And the American people have also opened up their hearts. Many have given generously to support the ongoing relief efforts. The Red Cross is providing assistance to help meet the immediate needs

of those who've been displaced. And I would encourage anybody who wants to lend a hand to go to usaid.gov to learn more -- that's usaid.gov -- to find out how you can be helpful.

As I told Prime Minister Kan last night, and reaffirmed at the Japanese embassy here in Washington today, the Japanese people are not alone in this time of great trial and sorrow. Across the Pacific, they will find a hand of support extended from the United States as they get back on their feet. After all, we have an alliance that was forged more than a half century ago, and strengthened by shared interests and democratic values. Our people share ties of family, ties of culture, and ties of commerce. Our troops have served to protect Japan's shores, and our citizens have found opportunity and friendship in Japan's cities and towns.

Above all, I am confident that Japan will recover and rebuild because of the strength and spirit of the Japanese people. Over the last few days, they've opened up their homes to one another. They've shared scarce resources of food and water. They've organized shelters, provided free medical care, and looked out for their most vulnerable citizens. One man put it simply: "It's a Japanese thing. When hard times hit, we have to help each other."

In these hard times, there remains, nevertheless, hope for the future. In one small town that had been flattened by the tsunami, emergency workers rescued a four-month-old baby who had been swept out of her parents' arms and stranded for days among the debris. No one can say for certain just how she survived the water and the wreckage around her. There is a mystery in the course of human events.

But in the midst of economic recovery and global upheaval, disasters like this remind us of the common humanity that we share. We see it in the responders who are risking their lives at Fukushima. We show it through the help that has poured into Japan from 70 countries. And we hear it in the cries of a child, miraculously pulled from the rubble.

In the coming days, we will continue to do everything we can to ensure the safety of American citizens and the security of our sources of energy. And we will stand with the people of Japan as they contain this crisis, recover from this hardship, and rebuild their great nation.

The White House - [Japan Earthquake and Tsunami](#)
U.S. Department of State - [Japan's Earthquake and Tsunamis](#)

2. Clinton Offers U.S. Support for Tunisia's Transition to Democracy (03-17-2011)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says the United States will work to create new jobs and economic opportunities in Tunisia as the country transitions from decades of autocratic rule. Speaking in Tunis, Clinton also praised the country for its response to the humanitarian crisis sparked by fighting in neighboring Libya.

Clinton is highest-level U.S. official to visit Tunisia since its people pressured Tunisian President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali to relinquish power on January 14 after weeks of protests that were triggered by the December 2010 suicide of a young fruit seller.

March 17, 2011

Speaking with Tunisian Foreign Minister Mouldi Kefi in Tunis March 17, Clinton said the Tunisian people “made history” and showed the world that “peaceful change is possible.”

The United States “will stand with you as you make the transition to democracy and prosperity and a better future,” Clinton said.

“We know there is a lot of work to be done, but we are very confident about the potential for democracy and economic opportunity in Tunisia, and the United States will be ready to assist in any way,” she said.

Clinton announced new U.S. support for democracy, job creation and greater prosperity in Tunisia. She said U.S. technology companies such as the Microsoft Corporation will work with Tunisian civil society groups to expand information and communications capacity across Tunisia by providing computers, software, training and other technical assistance.

“We will also work to create new jobs for Tunisians,” she said. The U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) “will offer financial support in the form of direct loans, guarantees and political risk insurance,” she said. “OPIC is already supporting two Tunisian private equity firms that are focused on small and medium-size businesses and will support investor visits by American businesses to Tunisia.”

The State Department had also announced March 15 that OPIC will be providing up to \$2 billion in financial support to encourage private sector investments and build partnerships between U.S. and Arab businesses in support of investment across the Middle East and North Africa,.

Clinton said the Obama administration is asking the U.S. Congress to establish a Tunisian-American enterprise fund that would “stimulate investment in the private sector and provide businesses with low-cost capital,” with a particular focus on Tunisia’s less-developed areas.

“We will also work through the United States-North Africa Partnership for Economic Opportunity to link business leaders and young entrepreneurs. We want the ideas of young Tunisians and we want to provide the startup capital that they would need to begin their own businesses,” Clinton said.

She said she and Foreign Minister Kefi also discussed additional ideas for economic assistance, and said Tunisia is eligible for consideration for a grant by the State Department’s Millennium Challenge Account, adding “we look forward to receiving the proposals from the government as they are formulated.”

The secretary also praised Tunisia’s humanitarian response to the violence in neighboring Libya, which has caused many refugees and foreign workers to seek emergency shelter in Tunisia.

“During a difficult time for your own country, the Tunisian people have shown great generosity in helping to ease the suffering on your own borders. The United States has been very proud to support your efforts,” she said.

[Remarks by Secretary Clinton, Tunisia Foreign Minister in Tunis](#) (03-17-2011)

3. Remarks by Ambassador DiCarlo at U.N. Debate on Afghanistan (03-17-2011)

Remarks by Ambassador Rosemary DiCarlo, U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at a Security Council Debate on UNAMA and Afghanistan

Thank you, Mr. President.

Special Representative de Mistura, welcome back to the Council, and thank you for your briefing today. We commend your strong leadership of UNAMA. I hope you will convey our deep appreciation to the Mission's staff for the work that they do on behalf of all of us to help build a stronger Afghanistan.

Also, a special welcome to Ambassador Tanin for once again addressing the Council. I wish to underscore our support for strengthening Afghan leadership and sovereignty which Ambassador Tanin discussed earlier. The transition to an Afghan security lead, the beginning of U.S. troop reductions in July, and the ongoing efforts to establish a new U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Declaration are all important aspects to restoring Afghan ownership.

Mr. President, let me touch on three issues this morning.

First, the process of transferring security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces is beginning. At their March 11 meeting in Brussels, NATO and ISAF Defense Ministers endorsed the recommendations of the Joint Afghan-NATO Inteqal Board to begin the transition to Afghan-led security responsibility. In the coming days, we expect that President Karzai will announce which areas of Afghanistan will first undergo this transition. This decision will be based on a thorough assessment of conditions on the ground, performed jointly by the Afghan government and ISAF in the months since Lisbon. The transition process will be gradual and will further bolster Afghan capacity.

Although this transition will be largely security-focused, it will also have an important civilian role. We were pleased that the Secretary-General's report identified several areas where the United Nations can play a valuable role in this process, including mediation, conflict resolution, human rights, Afghan capacity-building, and supporting Afghan coordination of international assistance. We encourage continued strong cooperation between UNAMA and ISAF as the transition gets underway.

Second, we welcome the conclusion of last year's legislative elections with the January 26 inauguration of the Wolesi Jirga. The Secretary-General concluded that, despite significant flaws in the elections, Afghanistan's electoral institutions performed admirably under extremely challenging circumstances. We concur.

We understand that the Special Court has begun a recount of elections in several provinces. We remain concerned about any actions that could undermine the electoral process' integrity, and we urge all Afghan institutions to act within their clearly defined areas of competence, in accordance with the relevant Afghan laws and the Constitution. We look forward to having the UN continue its partnership with the different branches of the Afghan government as they carry out their respective functions under Afghan law, including the electoral-reform process.

Third, as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted in her remarks at the Asia Society last month, the year 2011 will see the confluence of three "surges": a joint Afghan and international military offensive against al-Qaida and the Taliban; a civilian campaign to bolster the Afghan government,

economy, and civil society; and an intensified diplomatic push to bring the Afghan conflict to an end and chart a new and secure future for the region. The security and governance gains produced by the Afghan and international military and civilian surges have, as Secretary Clinton put it, “created an opportunity to get serious about a responsible reconciliation process, led by Afghans and supported by intense regional diplomacy and strong U.S. backing.”

Under Afghan leadership and ownership, important efforts are already underway to begin a national discussion on reconciliation. President Karzai has formed the High Peace Council, which includes representatives from across Afghanistan. Council leaders are holding meetings in key provinces throughout the country with tribal leaders, civil society, including women, and villagers to hear their hopes and concerns. They are working to form local councils to begin engaging the insurgents and the broader community. We fully support this Afghan effort. We also applaud UNAMA’s efforts to support the High Peace Council through the Salaam Support Group.

Over the past two years, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community have laid out clear conditions for insurgents who wish to abandon the fight and rejoin Afghan society: they must renounce violence, cut all ties with al-Qaida, and abide by the Afghan Constitution, including its provisions protecting the rights of women and minorities. Insurgents who choose the path of peace will find a willing partner in the United States.

Reconciliation will require the support of Afghanistan’s neighbors, including, most importantly, Pakistan. Pakistan has legitimate concerns that the Afghan government must acknowledge. But Pakistan also has important responsibilities, including taking firm action to prevent the Afghan Taliban from using Pakistani territory as a safe haven to continue its insurgency. Pressure from Pakistan will help push the Taliban toward the negotiating table and away from al-Qaida.

Mr. President, let me also comment briefly on recent civilian casualties. Our principal goal remains to protect the Afghan people. We deeply regret the unintended injury or death of any civilian in the course of military action. The United States and international forces have made extraordinary efforts to reduce civilian casualties and have seen some success, although there is more work to be done. Insurgents, on the other hand, are responsible for at least 75 percent of civilian casualties, and they use innocent civilians as human shields, extort them for support, take them as hostages, and tax their harvests.

Mr. President, we believe this year holds great promise for Afghanistan and the wider region. We are committed to continued support for the government and people of Afghanistan as they move beyond the current conflict toward a brighter future.

Finally, the U.S. delegation supports the extension of the UNAMA mandate for a further twelve months and thanks the German Mission for their leadership of these negotiations.

Thank you, Mr. President.

[U.S., Allied and Afghan Forces on Track for Transition](#) (03-16-2011)

4. Clinton Stirred by Visit to Egypt's Tahrir Square (03-16-2011)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said her visit to Tahrir Square in Cairo, the focal point of Egypt's peaceful political revolution, was "an extraordinary uplifting experience," and says she believes that the Egyptian people are up to the challenge of creating a strong, functioning democracy.

Speaking in Cairo March 16, [Clinton told NBC Television](#) that the Egyptian people are "making their own history," and although the United States stands ready to assist, the country's political transformation is "being molded by Egyptians themselves, as is only proper."

The secretary is the first U.S. Cabinet-level official to visit Egypt in the aftermath of political protests that forced President Hosni Mubarak to resign February 11. She said it was "exhilarating" to go to the square and "see Egyptians with smiles on their faces saying hello, welcoming me to the new Egypt."

While there, Clinton said she was reminded of "the power of the human spirit and universal desire for human rights and democracy," and said it was "just thrilling to see where this happened."

She told NBC it will be challenging for the Egyptian people to translate the enthusiasm and energy that drove their demands for political change into the political and economic reforms needed to establish "a strong, functioning democracy, more jobs for people, a real sense of a positive future."

But the Egyptians are "up for that challenge," she said.

"I feel very good about what the Egyptians are doing. It is an Egyptian project, an Egyptian story," she said.

She told Egyptian and American staff at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo March 16 that the United States, as the world's oldest democracy, has had experience translating democratic principles into reality and knows that it not easy.

"We've had a lot of struggles along the way. We've had our own problems in overcoming divisions, fighting a civil war, reaching out to include women, people of different religions and backgrounds and races — all in the American democracy," she said.

But Clinton said she is confident that "Egypt is going to break the mold."

"You are going to show how democracy works in a way that, for generations to come, not only future Egyptians but people everywhere are going to point and say, 'That was one of the most important historic turning points.' The pyramids are magnificent, but nowhere near as magnificent as what you have already done," she said.

Clinton said it will also be challenging to ensure that "no one is permitted to hijack this revolution, no one is permitted to turn the clock back on this revolution, no one is permitted to claim it for only one group of Egyptians and try to exclude other Egyptians."

The United States supports those who back a process that will allow the free and fair election of those who will lead Egypt's new democracy, and Clinton said that beyond elections, "what has to happen is to really embed all of the values of democracy into the hearts and minds of the Egyptian citizens."

[Fact Sheet on U.S. Support for Economic Growth in Egypt](#) (03-15-2011)

5. Ambassador Rice's Remarks on Libya (03-16-2011)

United States Mission to the United Nations
Office of Press and Public Diplomacy
Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations
New York, NY
March 16, 2011

Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Security Council Stakeout on Libya

Ambassador Rice: Good evening everybody. We have had yet another long day of negotiations on very serious texts that would deal in a concrete, and we believe meaningful way, with the situation on the ground in Libya. The United States has been playing a very active and very engaged role in leading this process inside the Council along with colleagues from Britain, and Lebanon, and France, and we are interested in a broad range of actions that will effectively protect civilians and increase the pressure on the Qadhafi regime to halt the killing and to allow the Libyan people to express themselves and their aspirations for the future freely and peacefully. We will continue our negotiations early tomorrow, fully focused on the urgency and the gravity of the situation on the ground, and it's my hope that we may be in a position to vote a serious resolution as early as tomorrow. We are working very hard toward that end. I'm happy to take a few questions.

Reporter: Ambassador, given what you said, now is the U.S. in a position to say clearly, that although some details need to be worked out, you do support the position of a no-fly zone over Libya?

Ambassador Rice: We are discussing very seriously and leading efforts in the Council around a range of actions that we believe could be effective in protecting civilians. Those include discussion of a no-fly zone. But the U.S. view is that we need to be prepared to contemplate steps that include, but perhaps go beyond, a no-fly zone at this point, as the situation on the ground has evolved, and as a no-fly zone has inherent limitations in terms of protection of civilians at immediate risk.

Reporter: (Inaudible) Arab participation. How important is that to the United States?

Ambassador Rice: We think Arab leadership and participation is very important. We are in discussions with Arab and other partners about what role they are prepared to play. Obviously, the request for action came from members of the Arab League, and we think that as a consequence of that, they ought to be ready and willing to contribute in very meaningful ways.

Reporter: Churkin made a point saying that they proposed a ceasefire be voted on today and that they were willing to negotiate on the larger part tomorrow. But that it was rejected and to ask if it was rejected. Did you guys reject it, and, if so, why?

Ambassador Rice: It was not a majority in the Council that was ready to talk about a ceasefire that wasn't accompanied by enforcement action. The bulk of the members of the Council were focused on a very substantial and detailed text that would have gone beyond calls for a ceasefire, which, in fact, were already embedded in 1970. But that would, in fact, entail the Council taking meaningful action swiftly. And that's what our focus was.

Reporter: Thank you. Now that you have two draft resolutions — the Russian one and the French one — how are you going to overcome this obstacle in procedural terms? And do you think somebody is playing a filibuster role to give Qadhafi's regime enough time to kill its people?

Ambassador Rice: There was a text that was formally introduced last night. It was a long and detailed text. We had hours of substantive discussions about it, elements, today. We will continue that tomorrow. And I think that is the real basis which most members of the Council want to act.

We don't think that that is mutually exclusive of another demand for a ceasefire. We had one in effect in 1970, in the lengthy and substantive text that is under negotiation. It's quite conceivable that that element could be drawn from the Russian draft and incorporated.

So, we don't see these as necessarily mutually exclusive. I think most members of the Council were focused on the importance of the Council taking swift and meaningful action to try to halt the killing on the ground.

[Close to 300,000 People Flee Violence in Libya](#) (03-16-2011)

6. U.S. Helps Bulgaria Destroy Surplus Missiles and Launchers (03-15-2011)

State Department Helps Bulgaria Destroy Surplus Man-Portable Air Defense Systems

The U.S. Department of State has assisted the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria in safely destroying 500 surplus Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS) missiles and 500 grip stocks (launchers). Following the disposal operation, the Department of State will provide additional funding to support clearance operations around the Chelopechene Ammunition Storage facility, where a catastrophic explosion of obsolete munitions occurred in 2008. U.S. assistance and funding was provided by the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA).

The United States, working with the Slovene International Trust Fund for Humanitarian Demining and Victims Assistance (ITF), will provide approximately \$2.2 million to fund contractors who will provide advice, logistical assistance, training, and clearance support for the Chelopechene cleanup. In addition, the United States and the ITF also will facilitate the clearance of 13 acres of the nearby river channel and small lakes in partnership with the Regional Center for Underwater Demining (RCUD) in Montenegro.

Developed in the 1950s, MANPADS were designed to provide military ground forces protection from enemy aircraft. However, in recent years, terrorists have actively sought out these weapons systems because of their portability, ease of concealment, and potential threat to civilian aviation. Since 2003, U.S. Conventional Weapons Destruction efforts have helped safely dispose of more than 32,000 excess, loosely secured, illicitly held, or otherwise at-risk MANPADS in 30 countries worldwide.

To learn more about the U.S. Department of State's efforts to reduce and destroy excess, unstable, and loosely secured conventional weapons and munitions around the world, visit the PM/WRA website at www.state.gov/t/pm/wra.

7. Vice President Biden on Next Steps in U.S.-Russia Relationship (03-14-2011)

The full text of this commentary by Vice President Biden was published March 14 by the International Herald Tribune and is in the public domain. There are no republication restrictions.

The Next Steps In the U.S.-Russia Reset
By Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
International Herald Tribune
March 14, 2011

When we came into office two years ago, our relationship with Russia had reached a low point. The war between Russia and Georgia played a role in that decline, but even before that conflict erupted in August 2008, a dangerous drift was under way.

While we no longer considered each other enemies, you couldn't always tell that from the rhetoric flying back and forth. Ironically, this came at a time when American and Russian security interests, as well as economic interests, were more closely aligned than ever.

That's why President Obama made it a priority to reset our relationship with Russia — and asked me to launch it just three weeks into the new administration at the Munich Security Conference. I said then that “the United States and Russia can disagree and still work together where our interests coincide. And they coincide in many places.”

We focused the reset on concrete outcomes that serve both countries' interests — “win-wins,” as President Obama calls them.

Two years later, the benefits to both our countries — and to international security — are clear, including: the new Start Treaty that further limits strategic nuclear weapons, cooperation on the peaceful use of nuclear energy, collaboration on Afghanistan that facilitates the flow of soldiers and supplies, and the most stringent sanctions ever on Iran and North Korea for their pursuit of nuclear weapons.

The next frontier in our relationship will be building stronger ties of trade and commerce that match the security cooperation we have achieved.

Since the reset, major American companies — including Chevron, Pepsico, Alcoa, General Electric and Cisco — have signed major deals in Russia. Last week, in Moscow, I witnessed the signing of a \$2 billion sale of eight Boeing 777 aircraft to Aeroflot. Boeing estimates that this contract alone will sustain 11,000 jobs in the United States. This expands on last year's agreement to sell 50 737s to Russian Technologies. All of these contracts allow our companies to tap into unique Russian technical expertise and make even better products that we can sell in Russia and the rest of the world.

Yet our trade and investment relationship is nowhere near where it could or should be. Russia was America's 37th largest export market in 2010, and the value of goods that cross our borders with Canada and Mexico every few days exceeds the annual value of our trade with Russia.

One way to realize the potential of that relationship is to bring Russia more fully into the international trading system. That is why we strongly support Russia's effort to join the World Trade Organization.

Accession will enable Russia to deepen its trade relations with the United States — and the world. And it will give American companies greater and more predictable access to Russia's growing markets, expanding both U.S. exports and employment. Being a part of the W.T.O. means that Russia will have to play by the rules or face enforcement actions.

Once Russia does what is required to join the W.T.O., we will also work with Congress to terminate the application to Russia of the Jackson-Vanik amendment — a Cold War era law that tied trade relations with Russia to Jewish emigration, but remains on the books.

These steps are crucial components of our administration's trade agenda.

But even if they do join W.T.O., Russia's business and legal climate and backsliding on democracy will present serious obstacles. Pragmatic businessmen and women will invest where they can expect a reasonable return and some assurance that the legal system will provide due process.

Americans, Europeans, and Russians themselves, are less likely to invest confidently in a country where property rights are frequently violated, where fortunes can be lost because of legal abuses, where companies can be seized on a politician's whim, and where a lawyer like Sergei Magnitsky can be arrested after accusing the police of fraud — and then die in detention before ever being tried.

No amount of government cheerleading or public relations rebranding will bring wronged or nervous investors back to this type of market. Only bold and genuine change can do that.

At the same time we have increased our cooperation with the Russian government, our administration has spoken out on allegations of misconduct in the trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and of the beating and detention of "Strategy 31" demonstrators — and we will continue to do so in defense of universal values. But real opposition parties, independent media and impartial courts are also the best tools for fighting corruption — the biggest barrier to economic growth in Russia. Russians know this.

Polls show that most Russians want to choose their national and local leaders in competitive elections; to assemble freely; and to have a free press. That's a message I heard recently when President Medvedev said that "freedom cannot be postponed."

In the summer of 1979, I led a delegation of senators to Moscow to discuss the second Strategic Arms Limitation Talks agreement (SALT II). I sat across from President Leonid Brezhnev and Premier Alexei Kosygin. It was a very different time. I recall Mr. Kosygin saying: "Let's agree that we do not trust you, you do not trust us and we have good reason not to trust each other."

He was absolutely right back then. But he would be wrong today.

Russians and Americans inside and outside of government have worked hard to overcome decades of mistrust, to identify common ground, and to foster a more secure and more prosperous future for both countries.

If two great nations that for 40 years stood on opposite sides of the 20th century's deepest divide can stand side-by-side in facing 21st century challenges, it will benefit not just the United States and Russia — but the world.

(Joseph R. Biden, Jr. is the vice president of the United States.)

8. Excerpts: White House Officials Comment on Iran (03-11-2011)

Briefing by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon and Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes on Libya and the Middle East

MR. VIETOR: Thank you very much, everybody, for getting on. We appreciate you taking the time. Today we have the President's National Security Advisor Tom Donilon and Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes, who are here to talk a little bit about Libya and take some questions from you.

So with that, I'll turn it over to Tom.

MR. DONILON: All set? Thank you, Tommy. And thanks, everybody, for taking the time this afternoon. We thought it would be a useful exercise to spend some time this afternoon not just talking about Libya, which I'm prepared to do, and Ben is as well, but also to talk about how we're thinking about the broader set of events in the Middle East.

And we do view them as a broad set of events. Indeed, it's hard to overstate the significance of the change, the historic change that is sweeping the region. And we are engaged, as I know many of you know, in efforts really across the region, from Tunisia all the way to obviously our ongoing efforts in Iraq.

And I thought what I'd do at the outset here is lay down several principles that inform our approach and have informed our approach from the outset. I'll then talk about a couple of specifics. I also want to talk about an issue that we haven't spent a lot of time talking to you all about in recent days, which is Iran. I have a couple of things to say on that. And then I'd be glad to take your questions.

First, with respect to our overall approach, essentially how we think about this and how we're approaching the challenges, and let me make a couple of observations.

First, the turmoil in the region, the events in the region, present challenges as well as historic opportunities for the United States and for the people of the region. These are indigenous movements, first and foremost, and they do offer an opportunity to transform the narrative that defined the Arab world for decades. Democratic movements that have emerged can also counter and are countering, I think, the extremist narrative of violent political change that al Qaeda and affiliated groups, as well as Iranian exported violent revolution that have -- are seen as narratives in the region.

This is a strong counter-narrative. This is really an important point I think. These are indigenous movements. They are movements by people seeking more representative and responsive government. They run quite counter to the narratives of al Qaeda and the Iranian narrative -- and I'll talk about that in a minute. These really are movements that are tremendous examples of people pursuing their aspirations in a non-violent fashion. And it's a critically important point.

As I said, there's enormous opportunities in this current situation. And as you all know, I am charged day in and day out to plan to avoid ranges of possible negative outcomes in situations, but I think we also have to prepare to take advantage of the profound movement here and really not be paralyzed in any way by the potential downsides, but really be prepared to embrace the positive upsides of what's going on in the region.

Second, our efforts are based on a set of key principles that the President articulated from the outset. One, we oppose violence and repression. Two, we work in the approach to this situation from the perspective of a set of universal values that the President articulated quite clearly. And three, we support a process of political change that opens up societies and leads to governments that are more responsive to the aspirations of the people of the region.

Third, we strongly support reform as the basis for stability in the region. We support peaceful and meaningful democratic transitions throughout the region. In particular, we support the right to free expression, political participation, confidence in the rule of law, and governments that are transparent and responsive and accountable to their people. We believe that such reform is the basis for stability in the region.

Next, it's not only political reform that's important here -- and I want to make this point very strongly -- it's also the economic change and economic reform, and we are very, very focused on this. It is key to the success of these transitions to representative and responsive government. We are very tightly focused on a range of efforts here to promote economic change and economic reform through our own bilateral assistance efforts, by leveraging our leadership in the international financial institutions that are focused on this -- on reform in the region, and, frankly, through our efforts with wealthier nations in the region who also need to work with us and work with their fellow nations in the region in order not to miss this opportunity.

This is a very important piece of what's going on here. And indeed, that will be an important focus of Secretary Clinton's trip to the region next week, where she'll be in Tunisia and in Egypt.

... One more topic and then I'll take questions -- on Iran. And the reason I wanted to raise it is that -- and some of your papers have had these stories about how somehow the changes in the Middle East that we've seen over the last couple of months work to Iran's benefit. This is really an important point to think about.

In sharp contrast to the activities in Tahrir Square in Cairo and throughout the region, Iran has really laid bare its hypocrisy. It applauds universal rights of others in the region but continues to suppress its own people, including mass arrests and killing those who dare speak out against the regime. It's not a surprise from my perspective -- who has been at the forefront of our efforts with respect to trying to deal with the Iranian nuclear program -- that it's trying to divert attention. It's had grave difficulty delivering economic progress. The leadership is out of touch and its narrative of exporting the Islamic revolution has been discredited across the region, as well as within Iran.

Iran is isolated on its nuclear program and support for terrorism. We are continuing to enhance that isolation. And the bottom line is this: The Iranian narrative really does, I think if you do a sharp analysis of this, fall in a quite empty way across the region when compared to the historic changes underway. ...

(End excerpts)
